



【Press Release】

Immediate Release

## Press Conference on “Relationship between Information Sharing and Family Well-being during the COVID-19 Outbreak”

*Overloaded with pandemic information,*

*“Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project” advises a ‘SMART’ selection of topics for enhancing family communication and happiness*

**(20 October 2020, Hong Kong)** Amid the third wave of COVID-19, the pandemic remains a hot topic in family e-chat groups. The frequency and reliability of information sent can affect the quality of family communication.

To this end, the “**Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project**” (“**The Project**”) team from the School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, the University of Hong Kong (“**HKU**”) conducted research on the “Relationship between Information Sharing and Family Well-being during the COVID-19 Outbreak” via questionnaires. The results were announced at today’s press conference.

Initiated and funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Project is in collaboration with HKU’s School of Public Health and the Technology-Enriched Learning Initiative and non-governmental organisations. The Project aims to encourage members of the public, social welfare units, and Integrated Family Service Centres to apply more elements of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to promote family well-being.

The survey, which was conducted online in late May 2020, successfully interviewed 4,914 people. The research results are summarised as follows:

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- The most common topics of family e-chat group communications were about COVID-19 (77.8%), daily life matters (57.5%) and expressing care (39.6%).
- The least common topics in family e-chat group communications were about expressing appreciation (8.3%), blessings (15.6%), and discussing unhappy matters related to themselves/families (15.6%).
- Positive messages: Sending or receiving messages on happy/interesting matters related to themselves/ their families, daily life matters, showing care and encouragement in family e-chat groups were related to better family communication, greater family harmony and happiness.
- Respondents who sent or received health information frequently reported poorer family communication, less family harmony and happiness.
- Among the respondents who shared COVID-19 information via instant messaging (n=2319), 64.5% always forwarded the information to family members via instant messaging tools at the peak of the pandemic. 72.5% of respondents always fact checked such information before forwarding it to their family members via instant messaging tools.
- The respondents who always forwarded COVID-19 information to their family members via instant messaging tools and always fact checked reported better family communication and greater family harmony and happiness when compared with their counterparts.

**Professor Lam Tai-hing, BBS, JP**, Principal Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project and Sir Robert Kotewall Professor in Public Health, Chair Professor of Community Medicine of School of Public Health, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU said the research showed that topics of family e-chat group communications are closely related to the quality of family communications, family harmony and family happiness. Professor Lam said, “During the peak of the pandemic, I can understand why Hong Kong people tended to share health information or pandemic news they had received with their loved ones as soon as possible. However,

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this can easily lead to an overload of anti-pandemic information, as well as negativity, within family e-chat groups if health news and messages on COVID-19 are forwarded right away, without thorough verification and fact-checking. Instead of spreading too much pandemic information which may not be authentic and trustworthy, the Project team advises that messages be checked and proven reliable before being forwarded, and unless the information has been verified, we should avoid sharing such information with family members.” Professor Lam further suggested that the public should smartly select content to be shared and to take a moment to think before clicking “forward”. He said it is essential for members of the public to question the authenticity and source of information received, and make full use of information and communications technology (ICT) tools to make judgments and analysis about messages or news. “By doing so, we can avoid causing confusion to our family. Not only will your act of mere forwarding without fact-checking fail to foster communications, but it will even harm overall family happiness.”

In addition, **Dr Kelvin Wang Man-ping**, the Project’s Co-Investigator and Associate Professor, School of Nursing, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, HKU recommended the public send more proactive and positive messages to family members amid the pandemic. “We can express our care and encouragement to family members through electronic means on e-chat groups by sharing fun and interesting matters. This can also help improve the quality of family communications, family harmony and family happiness.” Dr. Wang drew attention to the fact that the findings revealed more respondents from the older age groups prefer to disseminate positive energy such as care and support in their family e-chat groups. He said although the pandemic has eased, combatting “anti-pandemic fatigue” is still a top priority. “With reduced social gatherings, the younger generation can spend more time teaching the elderly to learn how to use information technology, especially instant messaging tools,” he said. “The more happy messages we share, the greater the quality of family communications, family harmony and family happiness will be.”

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At present, the Project assists 26 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and Integrated Service Centres (ISCs) operated by non-governmental organisations in Hong Kong to enhance their family services leveraging ICT and ultimately instill an attitudinal change among frontline workers – so that social workers are motivated to adopt more ICT elements in case management and interventions. The Project Team has thus initiated and co-created a series of i-Action programmes which provide hardware, software and technical support for the social service sector.

A representative of the Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC), a registered social service organisation working with the IFSC and the Project, Ms Ellie Yang, shared that workers from her centre had witnessed many young people who were reluctant to teach older people in their families how to use ICT tools, such as Zoom and WhatsApp. Younger people were less patient and tended to believe that older family members would be unable to master new technology, resulting in cross-generation communication barriers. As a result of this, the IFSC had organised a volunteer programme called “SMART e-Ambassador Training” to teach the elderly and those interested the basic skills of using mobile applications. The volunteers were given a chance to share ICT knowledge as widely as possible. She said that, after the programme, younger family members were pleasantly surprised to find older ones could communicate with them using ICT, and instant messaging or video-conference functions were helpful in building closer family bonds. Participating volunteers found the activity very rewarding in a sense that they could not only improve their family relationships, but also expanded their social circles and served the community by means of experiencing live streaming or family-friendly service provision. Participating in live streaming activity also help connect with the community despite the social distancing measures during the pandemic.

Another social worker, Mr Lucas Chung, from Caritas Integrated Family Service Centre - Tsuen Wan (East), also mentioned that it was quite a challenge for their

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centre to tailor new programmes for groups which were previously hard to reach especially during the pandemic. As a partner of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project for over three years of time, the centre's social workers were long accustomed to using ICT in their family service delivery. This practice in turn facilitated their organisation of the online Western calligraphy class specially for men, successfully putting ICT and art together in promoting innovative family services. Mr Lui, a service user participating in the calligraphy class, revealed that neither would he reach out to IFSCs' social workers proactively in the past, nor did he believe that his family or himself could benefit at all from family services. However, the calligraphy class allowed him to think differently – as the old saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure," and enhancing family well-being is not as hard as one might have imagined. With only simple tools like stationery and a mobile phone, he was able to acquire skills on Western calligraphy and write down positive, encouraging expressions, which are usually easier written than spoken, before learning how to turn them into beautiful WhatsApp stickers ready to be shared to his beloved family members.

Aiming to promote family well-being, the “**Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project**” will continue to encourage social welfare organisations and members of the public to make good use of ICT for family communications, and apply such elements in the work of IFSCs. In order to further promote family electronic communication skills and tips among the public, the “**Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project**” will launch a series of online video programmes, including guest interviews, demos about parent-child activities, life tips, and other content, via [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#), in the second half of 2020. In the meantime, the Project team will keep up with its endeavours in developing different family-friendly mobile games, which are readily available for free downloading on various platforms including our [Family Portal](#), for strengthening family connections and communications with the use of ICT and enhancing well-being through such e-resources.

- END -

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### Photo Captions:

Photo 1: Mr Eric Leung, Project Manager, Charities of The Hong Kong Jockey Club (Centre), Professor Lam Tai-hing, BBS, JP, Principal Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Third Right), Dr Kelvin Wang Man-ping, Co-Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Third Left), and representatives from partnering Integrated Family Service Centres of the Project (First and Second Left, and First and Second Right), attended the Press Conference on “Relationship between Information Sharing and Family Well-being during the COVID-19 Outbreak”.

Photo 2: Mr Eric Leung, Project Manager, Charities of The Hong Kong Jockey Club (Centre), Professor Lam Tai-hing, BBS, JP, Principal Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Fifth Right), Dr Kelvin Wang Man-ping, Co-Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Fifth Left), together with social worker representatives (Third and Fourth Left and Third and Fourth Right), volunteers (First and Second Right) and service users of integrated family services (First and Second Left), attended the event.

Photo 3: Professor Lam Tai-hing, BBS, JP, Principal Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project, announced the research findings of “Relationship between Information Sharing and Family Well-being during the COVID-19 Outbreak”.

Photo 4: Dr Kelvin Wang Man-ping, Co-Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project, shared tips on how to communicate smartly with family members using ICT and the importance of sending positive messages in family e-chat groups.

Photo 5: Professor Lam Tai-hing, BBS, JP, Principal Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Right) and Dr Kelvin Wang Man-ping, Co-Investigator of the Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project (Left) provided insights on how the Project Team assists members of the public to enhance the family well-being through

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community activities combined with information and communications technology elements.

### **About “Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project”**

Initiated by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust in 2018 with a donation of over HK\$157 million, the four-year Jockey Club SMART Family-Link Project is a cross-sectoral collaboration to advance the use of Information and Communications Technology (“ICT”) in family services. The Project aims to devise an innovative and evidence-based family service delivery model that leverages the effective use of ICT and data analytics to enable service users to better benefit from preventive, supportive and early remedial services provided by all 26 NGO-operated Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Service Centres to promote family well-being. The Project develops an online platform for capacity building, co-creation and co-learning of frontline staff; and organises public education and knowledge transfer programmes to strengthen family functioning.

Project partners include The University of Hong Kong (School of Public Health and Technology-Enriched Learning Initiative); Caritas – Hong Kong; Hong Kong Family Welfare Society; Hong Kong Christian Service; International Social Service – Hong Kong Branch; Christian Family Service Centre; The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council; Hong Kong Children and Youth Services; St. James’ Settlement; Tung Wah Group of Hospitals; Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council and The Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council.

### **Project Components:**

#### **Service Management System (i-Connect)**

The system will help reduce manual input and administrative work, facilitate early identification of at-risk cases and perform data analysis both at the centre-level and aggregated across centres and NGOs. Participating IFSCs will be equipped with

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electronic hardware and ICT applications to enhance service delivery.

### **Interventions leveraging ICT (i-Action)**

The Project Team initiated and co-created a series of i-Action programmes which provide hardware, software and technical support to the social service sector. The Project's i-Action programmes that are currently in place include:

1. Evaluation Tool Builder (an online questionnaire building platform for the easy collection of service users' feedback)
2. Co-created e-messages and an e-message Portal (for dispatching e-messages on SMS and WhatsApp to render timely interventions)
3. Co-designed & co-created gamified ICT tools for workers to incorporate ICT elements in their daily work, making activities fun to join
4. Mobile Apps for families to use together, including those on SMART Parenting and SMART Emotion

### **Capacity building (i-TLS)**

An online platform to facilitate frontline staff in sharing common information, useful resources and practice wisdom, both within the IFSC and across different centres in a co-learning e-circle.

### **Public Education & Knowledge Transfer**

Social media events, press events, mass media dissemination, media interviews, flagship mass community events, and public education campaigns will be utilised to increase public knowledge and understanding of healthy family functioning.

### **Big Data Analysis & Evaluation**

The School of Public Health of HKU will perform big data analysis on the data gathered through the i-Connect system. Such analyses can then help policymakers, IFSC operators, and even individual social workers understand the emerging service needs and proactively adjust their services accordingly to meet future needs.

For more information, visit [www.jcsmartfamilylink.hk](http://www.jcsmartfamilylink.hk)

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